

Wetlands



As their name implies, wetlands are a habitat that is often wet. Either year-round or just for a part of a year, wetlands' soil is covered with water, and a variety of plants and wildlife have adapted to these unique conditions. Often, Utah's wetlands are found in the form of marshes surrounding rivers, streams or lakes, but they can also occur in the spring and summer where water from melting snow collects.

Grasses, sedges, cattails and other wetland plants support a wide diversity of wildlife. Marshes are often filled with the sounds of songbirds, frogs, toads and other creatures, which rely on wetlands for food, water and shelter.

Hundreds of thousands of migrating shorebirds depend on the marshes surrounding the Great Salt Lake for food and rest during their cross-continental journeys.

Unfortunately, Utah's wetlands are disappearing at an alarming rate, and their wildlife is disappearing along with them. From urban development to non-native species, a variety of threats are making the future of Utah's wetlands uncertain.

Key Facts about Utah's Wetlands Habitat:



Very Rare

Covering just 0.2 percent of Utah's land area, wetlands are very rare in Utah.

Declining

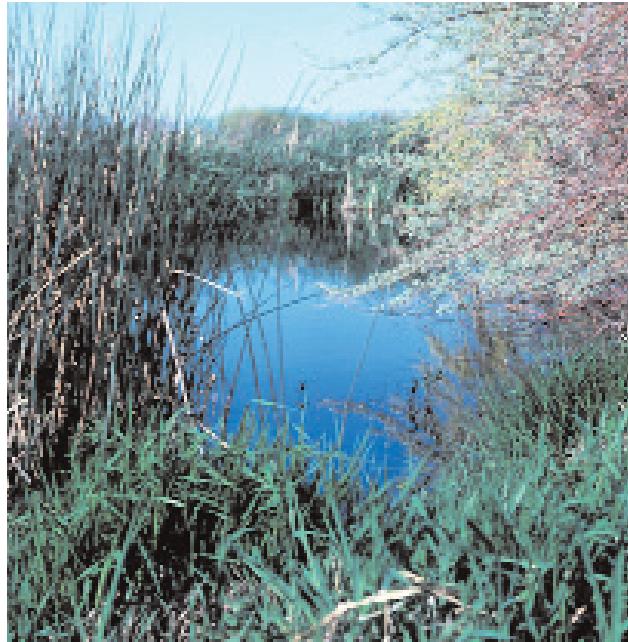
Utah's wetlands are declining in both their abundance and their condition. In addition, many of the state's remaining wetlands are suffering from human impacts.

Plant Life

Species such as cattail, bulrush and sedge are native to wetlands. Tamarisk is a non-native plant that has invaded many wetlands.

Animal Life

Wetlands are famous for the frogs and toads they support. Utah's wetlands are home to the Columbia spotted frog, western boreal toad, northern leopard frog, and other species. Wetlands are also home to a variety of snails, songbirds, shorebirds, snakes, and other wildlife.





American avocet

Species on the Edge

Utah's wetlands wildlife is declining for a number of reasons. Most importantly, their habitat is disappearing quickly. Because wetlands are so rare, and because they are home to so many species of concern, habitat loss is a critical issue.

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources has identified 36 wetlands species of conservation need, including the following:

Tier One—Very High Concern

Columbia spotted frog, least chub

Tier Two—High Concern

Preble's Shrew, Western boreal toad, desert springsnail

Tier Three—Moderate Concern

Black-necked stilt, northern leopard frog, American avocet

What's Threatening Utah's Wetlands?

Development—A variety of human developments, from housing to businesses, are quickly replacing wetlands.

Water Loss—Utah's drought and water demands from the state's expanding population are pulling water from native habitats, leaving less water for wildlife.

Energy Development—The roads, well pads and other developments associated with oil and gas extraction damage wetland habitats.

Pollution—Contaminants such as selenium can accumulate in wetlands, threatening wildlife throughout the food web.

Improper grazing practices—When not managed properly, grazing can lead to water pollution and habitat loss in wetlands.

Invasive plants—Plants such as the non-native tamarisk are rapidly invading Utah's wetlands, outcompeting native plants that provide food and shelter for wetlands wildlife.

Loss of Nearby Habitats—Wetlands are closely connected to the habitats that surround them. As neighboring habitats disappear, wetlands are not as valuable for wildlife.

Taking Action

Protecting Utah's wetlands will require coordinated action among a variety of partners across the state.

Conservation Actions

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources is working actively to restore Utah's wetlands. Because these areas provide important wildlife habitats and a variety of benefits for people across the state, the division has identified the following key actions to support Utah's wetlands:

1. Educate the public about the value of wetlands and how we can protect them.
2. Permanently conserve key wetlands habitats and restore degraded wetlands.
3. Partner with other government agencies and private landowners to enhance wetlands.
4. Secure water flows to wetlands.
5. Support energy development techniques that preserve wetlands.
6. Encourage developers to protect and enhance wetlands to offset wetlands development.
7. Research and monitor wetland habitats.

Conservation Partners

To accomplish these tasks, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources is partnering with a diverse group of public and private groups that include the Utah Chapter of the Audubon Society, private landowners, local governments, the Utah Reclamation Mitigation and Conservation Commission, and many others.